

Two Compendious  
**DISCOURSES:**

*Dedicated to the*  
The one concerning the

**Power of God:**

The other about the  
**CERTAINTY and EVIDENCE**  
OF A

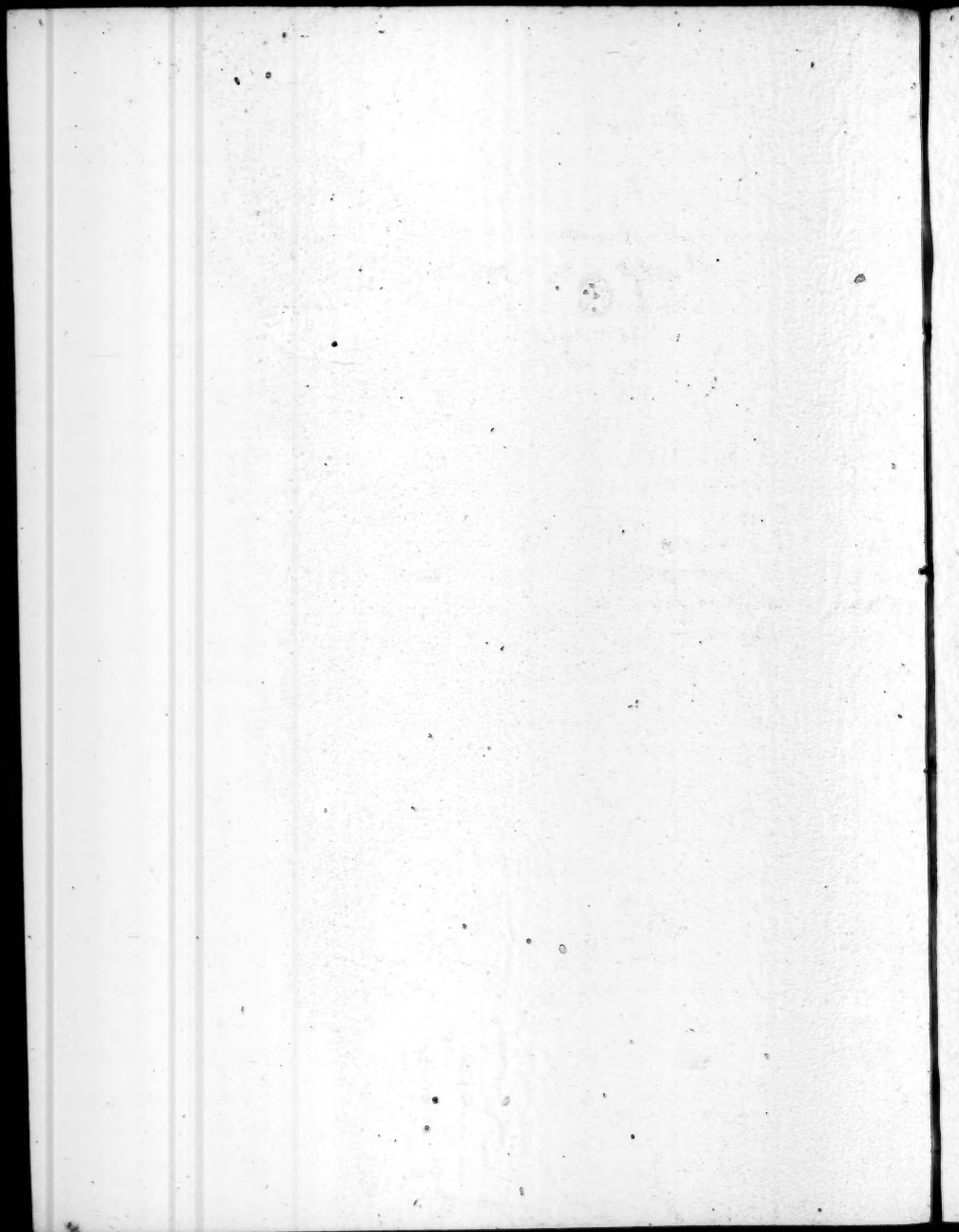
**Future State.**

*Thomas Smith*

*Published in opposition to the growing  
Atheism and Deism of the Age.*

L O N D O N :

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To the Honourable,  
Samuel Pepys Esquire.

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SIR,

**P**Resuming upon your leave and favour, I take the liberty of inscribing your name before two short discourses, written several years since, which I now publish with very little alteration. In the time of a great fire no one is to be an idle stander by or looker on: but he is to contribute, as much as in him lyes, to the extinguishing of the raging and devouring flames: tho' it be onely by handing a bucket of water toward the next engine, which others are laboriously managing with art and skill. This seems to be our present case. Dissoluteness of manners, like a pestilential vapour, having diffused its venomous influence farre and wide, and Atheisme and Deisme growing rampant, and all Religion, whether natural or revealed and instituted, being run down and ridiculed by several, who set up for Wits and Virtuofos, and pretend to greater measures of reason and understanding, than their dull forefathers ever had, who, it seems, prepossessed and prejudiced by a simple education, could not attain to those new discoveries, which they have made: a due concerne for the honour of God and of religion, which is founded upon eternal and essential rules of righteousness and wisdom, will justifie any mans discreet and sober zeal, in opposing the growth of such outrageous and impudent blasphemy and infidelity.

*This I alledge in defense of my little attempt : tho' it may be, it will be lookt upon to be almost as vaine, as if I should go about to stop the violent current of water at London-bridge, when it comes swelling and flowing in with full wind and tide, with my naked hand : all other methods and remedies at present in this wicked and licentious age being ineffectual, I must not say, without a temporary Inquisition, but I will say, without a strict and rigorous execution of the laws, made by our wise and godly Ancestors : which would make these bold men, if not more sober, honest, and virtuous, at least more modest, reserved, and decent in their behaviour and conduct. Having thus made out the sincerity of my intention and design in publishing these Papers, I am the less solicitous, whether I have with equal care and judgment performed the part of a Scholar, as well as of a Church-man : of which such excellently learned and thoroughly accomplished Gentlemen, as your self, are the most able and proper Judges. But however, whilst I am endeavouring in my mean way to serve and promote the common cause and interest of religion and virtue, I readily take advantage of this address ; which I present, as a memorial of the great respect, esteem, and honour, I have for you, upon the account of your public services and merit, and also of the many great obligations, flowing from an entire friendship, which you have been pleased for several years to lay upon*

S I R,

*Your most faithfull*

*and most humble Servant*

Tho Smith.



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# A DISCOURSE

Concerning the  
Power of God.

**A**LL error proceeds from an undue apprehension of things; which is caused, either by weakness and shallowness of judgment, when there is a defect and inability in the understanding to search to the bottom of things, to examine with a just and wise severity whatever is proposed, before it be admitted, and to weigh all circumstances in an even ballance; that is, according to sober, fix'd, and sure principles, bottomed upon reason, good sense, and unquestionable experience, and agreeable to the faculties of the mind, and the notions imprinted upon it: or else,

Which makes the error more dangerous and faulty, by an inconsiderate assent, and an over-hasty partiality, when the affections hinder the calm and deliberate debates of sober reason, and casting a mist before the understanding, altogether blind it: so that it shall not be able to discern truth from falshood, right from wrong, opi-

nion, and plausibility, and conjecture, from certainty, and knowledge, and demonstration. But where the ideas of things, capable of being fully known and proved, are distinct and proper, where the understanding is sound and clear, and where the operations of the mind are free, and undisturbed, either by irregular passion, or by foolish or irrational prejudice, truth is readily discerned and entertained, and makes its way into the mind, with the same easiness and quickness, as the streams of light flow upon the eye, which is open, and not otherwise indisposed to receive them: by the help of which it may see all those glorious and astonishing objects, that from every part of the visible creation present themselves.

For want of this rightful method and just principle in examining the truth of things, many are very apt and very willing to cheat themselves, and out of a lazy kind of ignorance, and a foolish belief, that all things are, and must be, as they phansie, take up idle and false opinions, and that not only concerning things of nature, (of which be our perceptions true or false, it matters not much in things purely speculative, if they have no influence upon life, manners, or government; and a latitude of opinion is justly allowable in such things also, as are not capable of a clear and satisfactory decision, either by sense, experiment, or demonstration) but also concerning religion: opinions, which contradict its holy designs, and directions, and commands: such too, as are derogatory to the nature and attributes of God; such, as are altogether dishonourable and unworthy of him, and inconsistent with his divine perfections.

That God is a being absolutely perfect, and consequently of infinite power, nature and right reason, even abstracted from revelation, suggest to every considering man to admit and assent unto: and no one, who hath any just or true notion of God, can possibly deny it,  
without

without great violence done to his faculties : and yet when any difficulty presents it self , which we cannot master, and when we are puzzled and dissatisfied in our search of things, we presently fly off , and whatever is above the reach of our nature, or above the comprehension of our knowledge , or above our contrivance , or above our power, must be denied to be possible even to God himself, because we cannot conceive it , or rather will not conceive it aright : thus bringing all things down to our narrow and scanty model, and levelling, not onely the highest mysteries of revealed religion, but the essential perfections of the Godhead, knowable by the light of nature, and the principles of natural religion, that there are such, and necessarily must be so, with our low, dull, and earthy phantasies.

To obviate these mistakes therefore, which may arise from a misapprehension of this divine Attribute, I shall endeavour to settle the true notion of it : upon the clearing up of which , all those doubts and scruples , and objections, which some bold and presumptuous men, as void for the most part of all honest and sober morals, as they are of sound learning and philosophy , being equally debauched and corrupted in their understanding, and in their behaviour and practise, are wont as it were triumphantly to propose even in places of publick resort , as well as in their ordinary conversation , in this Sceptical and Atheistical age , against a creation, against the miracles recorded in the holy Scriptures, against the doctrine of the ever blessed and adorable Trinity, and of the incarnation of the Son of God, and lastly against the belief of a resurrection , and the like, will vanish and disappear; and all those truths , whether natural or revealed, which they with equal rashness and impiety have pronounced impossible, will be found just objects, as to the former, of our knowledge and understanding, and

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as to the latter, of faith and of a wise and rational assent.

In order hereunto I will shew these three things :

- I. What is the true and proper notion of the divine power ; and in what respect it is said, that nothing is impossible to God : that
- II. The attribute of infinite power is necessarily included in the notion and idea of God : and that
- III. It is altogether unreasonable to limit the power of God in things possible, or deny any doctrine of religion, whether revealed in Scripture, or flowing from the principles of natural reason, because it transcends either our power or our understanding.

I. What concerns the first particular, *viz.* what is the true and proper notion of the divine power, and in what respect it is affirmed both by the voice of nature and Scripture, that nothing is impossible to God, may be comprized in these two following propositions.

1. The first proposition is, that God can readily and easily effect and do whatever is absolutely possible to be done.

The world, it is certain, from the beginning has been subject to the laws of Providence, and all things run the course, which was at first set them, and are directed and carried on to the several ends of their creation by an unerring hand: and notwithstanding their several tendencies, all concur to accomplish the great design of God, and that without prejudice to their respective natures. Thus the celestial orbs and vortices have their fixt periods and revolutions: the sun, and moon, and stars are regular in their motion, and take their rounds day and night about the earth: and the great ocean in its ebbs and flows follows the laws of motion and statick

tick principles. And so for all other natural Agents : they have their limits set them , which they cannot pass : they only do what is agreeable to their nature ; and they can do no more : the powers , whereby they act , being necessary , but withal confined. Yet though this order and course of things be fixt and settled , and seldom interrupted by God , unless to alarm the world , and for some great end , and to shew , that nature depends upon him , and that all things subsist by his power , which is onely able to preserve what it first made : yet there is no repugnance , that things might have been made otherwise , than they are , if it had pleased him. We cannot but acknowledge several possibilities of things , lying in their causes , which we , by reason of our weakness , cannot draw forth into effect : for want of such and such combinations , and by reason of several impediments and accidents , which it is not in our power to remove , or through some indisposition in the matter to be wrought upon , it happens , that those possibilities are not clothed with actual existence : there being no repugnancy in the nature of the thing it self , and the defect wholly arising from some other cause. Whatsoever effects there are then of the divine power now existing , more may be produced : new species of things may be added , and new worlds made , whatever becomes of the hypothesis of the habitableness of the planets , and of the opinion , that every fixed Star is a Sun , at an almost immense distance from the earth , and from one another : and those things , which are , might have been endowed with different powers , activities , qualities , impressions , motions , and operations ; and matter made capable of other far different modifications , and determinations of particular motions , from which might have been derived inconceivably great variety of other natural productions.

But



And here it may be necessary to interpose, that God does no more, than what he first wills: his power is directed by his wisdom and divine pleasure, which is the rule and measure of it: which consideration should justly satisfy us about the late creation of this visible world, in which we breath. To call in question therefore the accompts given of it by Moses, who fixes its beginning not many thousand years ago, as our modern Atheists and Deists do, and to object idle, foolish, unlearned, and groundless phantasies against those authentick Registers, acknowledged in all ages since his time, and which the more grave and judicious sort of Heathen Writers have revered, and from whence they have borrowed several of their tenents both of philosophy and religion, though oftentimes artificially disguised, or corrupted with their fabulous additions, is altogether irrational. For let these men of high-flown wit and phansie deny, if they can or dare, and at the same time pretend to reason like Philosophers and Scholars, whether this is not to prescribe to the almighty and alwise God, what he should have done, and with equal impudence and impiety limit his will. For suppose, for arguments sake, that the world had been created forty or fifty thousand years before, or if they will, so many myriads and millions of years, and that the chronology of the Chineses, Chaldeans, and Egyptians, which latter is preserved out of the writings of Manetho, a Priest of that country, who lived in the time of Ptolemæus Philadelphus, by Julius Africanus, and out of him by Eusebius and Georgius Syncellus, were not fabulous, and proceeded not from a vain affectation of Antiquity, but had some ground in nature and history: yet considering the eternal power of the God-head, the same question might as well be put, (and it may be put thousands of years hence, if the present constitution of the world should continue so long undissolved) why



why was it not produced sooner: this mighty space, as it seems to us, poor, frail, and mortal creatures, who are permitted by the great God, who made us, to live here upon earth three or fourscore years at furthest, being comparatively inconsiderable, and holding no proportion to a duration, which had no beginning. Thus, at last, these conceitedly inquisitive men lose themselves in the rambling and unbounded flights of their phansie, or else run themselves upon this gross absurdity, that dull and unactive matter is eternal, and take upon them to direct an alwise and infinite being, when, and what worlds he should make: not considering, that the mind of God is unsearchable, and past the comprehension of finite understanding, and that no reason ought to be demanded of his divine will and pleasure, and of his actions *ad extra*, as the School-pharse is.

For want of this consideration also, others there are, and the Platonists especially, who under a pretense of advancing the divine goodness, do really, and in effect, destroy it; whilst they make the emanations of it physical and necessary, which are most arbitrary and free, and the pure results of his will.

The powers of moral Agents are at their own disposal, to use when and how they please: and by this they are discriminated from natural; who act according to their utmost strength and vigour, unless their activity be hindred by a miracle, and from brutes, birds, and other animals, who are devoy'd of reason, and follow their innate instincts, motions, and appetites. Where there is a principle of knowledge and liberty in the mind to guide and direct it, as in men, who have thereby a power over themselves and their actions, it is far otherwise: and it is not necessary, that they do all which they can do. Nor is this power therefore to be accounted idle, and to no purpose: because they can make use of it, whenso-  
ever

ever it shall make for their interest and advantage, or whensoever their reason, or even their phansie, shall judge it fit and proper to reduce it into act. Much more is this to be allowed to God, whose other attributes are as infinite, as his power: Psalm cxv. 3. *Our God is in the heavens; he hath done whatsoever he pleased.* Psalm cxxxv.

(a) Theodor-  
etus in loc.  
Οὐ τῇ δυνάμει  
συνίμενα τὰ  
γινόμενα,  
ἀλλὰ τῇ βου-  
λήσιν ἡδυνάμει

6. (a) *Whatsoever the Lord pleased, that did he in heaven and in earth, in the seas, and in all deep places.* And if his wisdom had thought fit, and if he had once willed the same, instead of creating one world, he might have created a thousand.

μὴ οὐκ ἐπὶ ἀνάλογον τῶν πᾶσι μείζονα δύναμις ἔσται, ἀλλὰ τὰ αὐτὰ καὶ τοιαῦτα ὅσιν αὐτοῖς.  
The things, which now exist, are not fully proportionable to the divine power, so as to exhaust it, but only agreeable to his divine will and pleasure. For God could have created more and greater things than these: but he would only make so many, and of such sorts, species, and denominations, as it pleased him.

(a) The Greeke  
and Latine Fa-  
thers are very  
copious and  
careful, even to  
a philosophi-  
cal niceness,

However, the object of the divine power in its fullest latitude and comprehension, abstractedly considered, is, whatsoever is absolutely and simply possible. By which terms we are to exclude (b)

in their explications and illustrations of these common notions about the just and proper object of the divine power: a collection of which the Reader may find in Bishop Pearson's elaborate and learned Commentary on the Apostles Creed, where he treats of this particular argument, as of the rest of the Articles, with great accuracy and judgment. More authorities might easily be added by one of ordinary reading: but I forbear at present; it being a common place: and shall content my self only to adjoyn the concurrent testimonies of the Master of the Sentences, and Thomas Aquinas. Petrus Lombardus lib. 1. Sententiarum xlii. distinct.

Sunt alia quadam, quæ Deus nullatenus facere potest, ut peccata: non enim potest mentiri, non potest peccare. Sed non ideo omnipotentia Dei derrahitur vel derogatur, si peccare non posse dicitur: quia non esset hoc potentia, sed infirmitas. Si enim hoc posset, omnipotens non esset. Non ergo impotentia sed potestate imputandum est, quod ista non potest. Again, Manifestum est, Deum omnino nihil posse pati, & omnia facere posse, præter ea sola, quibus ejus dignitas laderetur, ejusque excellentia derogaretur: in quo tamen non est minus omnipotens. Hoc enim posse non esset posse, sed non posse. Herein following the doctrine of his Master S. Augustine, in his book de Symbolo, which he there cites: Deus omnipotens non potest mori, non potest falli, non potest miser fieri, nec potest vinci. Nec utique & hujusmodi absit, ut posset omnipotens. Si enim hujusmodi passionibus atque defectibus subijci posset, omnipotens minime foret: and in his book de spiritu & litera: Non potest Deus facere injusta, quia ipse est summa justitia & bonitas. Thomas Aquinas in Summa Theologica part 1. quæst. xxv. Artic. 3. Ea quæ contradictionem implicant, sub divinâ omnipotentia non continentur: quia non possunt habere possibilitatem rationem. Unde convenientius dicitur, quod ea non possunt fieri, quam quod

quod Deus ea non possit facere. Post. Peccare est deficere à perfecta ratione : unde posse peccare est posse deficere in agendo ; quod repugnat omnipotentia. Et propter hoc Deus peccare non potest, quia est omnipotens. The whole of what has been said both by Fathers and Schoolmen upon this subject, is summed up by the learned Dr. Overall, (then Dean of St. Pauls, and afterwards Bishop of Norwich) in a letter to his Friend, H. Grotius, written 16 May 1613. in this *very* definition and sentence : *Potentia [Dei] activa, qua omnia possible, qua non implicant contradictionem, impotentiam, iniquitatem, aliudque quid Deo indignum facere possit.*

1. Whatever is contrary to the nature and essential perfections of the Godhead. *Thus it is impossible for God to lie :* *ἐν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς Ἰσραὴλ Οὐδὲν*, Ebr. vi. 18: to which passage, as to many others in that Epistle, \* S. Clement alludes : *ἐν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς πᾶσι τοῖς Οὐδὲν, ἐν μὴ τὸ Ἰσραὴλ :* because he is a God of infinite veracity. *God cannot deny himself :* *ἀπορῶναι ἑαυτὸν ὁ θεὸς* 2 Tim. ii. 13. God cannot but make good his word, whether we will believe, or no : if we are resolved to be Infidels and Scepticks in the midst of so much conviction, which Christianity affords concerning the truth of its mysteries and doctrine, and the truth of its promises : if we throw in our scruples and doubts, and distrust his word, we shall one day be convinced and ashamed of such irrational infidelity : his word shall infallibly be effected ; veracity being as essential to God, as necessary existence : and if God cannot but be, he cannot be otherwise, than just and true. *If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful ; he cannot deny himself.* And for the same reason we remove from God whatsoever favours of imperfection, as being repugnant to the idea, which we have of him, who is a being infinitely and absolutely perfect. And in strictness of speech, if such things could be done, he would not be omnipotent ; because they are arguments and demonstrations of weakness. For what is a lye, but a plain confession of guilt, and of fear, that we dare not tell and own the truth, when we are demanded it ? Unfaithfulness is a breach of that moral honesty and integrity, which humane nature and the civil laws and rules of government require between man

\* In Epistola  
ad Romanos :  
edit. Oxon.  
1633. 4.  
pag. 36.

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and man. God is al sufficient, and therefore cannot stand in need of the assistance of his creatures: whereas we want, because we have not an absolute and full power and command over things, and cannot dispose of them, as and when we will, to supply our selves. Our being deceived proceeds from our ignorance: but God cannot be deceived, because he is omniscient, and knows the secret thoughts and intentions of the heart, and *all things are naked and open before him*: there being an utter impossibility of error in the divine understanding. Our sickness flows from illness of temper, natural decays of animal and vital spirits, and tainted and vitiated blood and other humors; and death is the punishment of sin, and the effect and consequence of a frail and brittle constitution: the curious machine of the body, being quite worn out by age, at last falling into pieces, tho' otherwise never so carefully preserved from the disorders of intemperance, or the mischiefs of chance, or the assaults of violence. All which imperfections the very notion of a God does wholly exclude and remove.

2. By this we are to exclude whatever implies a contradiction or a repugnancy in its nature; as that the same thing should be and not be at the same time, and in the same manner and respect: and that things, which have been, should now be made not to have been. Things might not have been, before they were: but when once they have been, they cannot but be: which onely is a necessity by way of supposition. Whatever then is repugnant to the nature and essence of a thing is therefore impossible, because otherwise the thing would be the same, and not the same: the essence would remain entire, and yet be destroyed at the same time: which is a clear and manifest contradiction. Power therefore, in the essential notion of it, is no way extensible either to the doing or reconciling real and perfect contradictions: because the opposite

opposite terms destroy each other, and consequently there is an utter impossibility of their subsisting together: and if we examine the contradiction thoroughly, we shall find, that there is always in one of the terms a plain and manifest denial of being. Thus to imagine, that the humane nature of our B. Saviour, by reason of its union with the word, should become in a manner immense, and fill all places, because the Godhead does; what is it, but to confound essential properties of things, which are altogether irreconcilable? or to assert, that a body, continuing one and the same, should yet be multiplied into several entire wholes: that the entire body of Christ should be in the least crum of a wafer, and the several parts of it be distinct, and retain the same figure and order, and be extended at their full length, as they lye unconfused as it were in an indivisible point: be in heaven and upon earth at the same time: be upon a thousand altars together in the most distant parts of the world, without any discontinuity, and be brought thither by the pronunciation of five words, not to urge the ugly and horrid consequences, which flow from the admittance of such a grossly absurd opinion; what is it, but to impose, under the pretense of an infallible authority, upon the faith, understanding, and reason of all mankind, and peremptorily lay down contradictory and self-destroying notions, as necessary terms and conditions of Catholick communion? If in things, which are plainly and confessedly possible in themselves, we are not to engage the infinite power of God without a just cause, nor to think God almighty obliged to make good our groundless and extravagant phantasies: much less are we to destroy the nature of things, and swallow down and maintain real and manifest contradictions, and make that, which would be one of the greatest wonders of the world, supposing, that it were possible, to be done ordinarily, and every where, and every day, a



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thousand times, without any other proof, than our bare phanſying ſo: as they do, who maintain the doctrine of Tranſubſtantiation in all the School-niceties of it, againſt Scripture and reaſon, againſt the principles of nature and philoſophy, againſt the attestation of ſenſe, and the judgment of antiquity, and againſt the experience of all mankind: and do all this, rather than admit of a figurative expreſſion in the words of the Inſtitution.

In favour of this monſtrous tenent, the Romaniſts object to us the incomprehenſibility of the myſteries of faith; and hence think, that they may elude all thoſe unanſwerable difficulties, which this new doctrine is charged with, and that there is argument enough to ſatiſſie their doubts in that miſapplied ſaying, the effect, it may be, of rapture and indiſcreet devotion, *Ideo credo, quia eſt impoſſibile*. But the great diſparity, which is between them, is eaſily obvious to any one, who will give himſelf leave to conſider things calmly and fairly, and not ſuffer himſelf to be impoſed upon by a pretenſe of an authority, abſolutely to be obeyed and ſubmitted to, as well in doctrine, as in matters and decrees of diſcipline, without the leaſt ſcruple and hesitation. As,

I. That there is the higheſt reaſon in the world to believe the myſteries of faith, tho' they transcend our utmoſt capacity; becauſe they are expreſſly and clearly revealed in the writings of the new Teſtament. It is the greateſt ſecurity of our faith imaginable, that God has ſaid it; and therefore let the thing revealed ſeem never ſo unlikely and harſh to my underſtanding, I have as much reaſon to believe it, as any thing, which happens ordinarily every day, and preſents it ſelf to my ſenſes; nay more: for there is a poſſibility, that a particular perſon may be deceived ſometimes, not to ſay all mankind, even in a matter of ſenſe: but there is an utter impoſſibility, that God ſhould be deceived in any propoſition he has  
thought



thought fit to reveal. But this they will not pretend to say for their Transubstantiation, that there is the same evidence of Scripture for it, or indeed, that they have any evidence at all, as many of their own party have confessed; and for want of which they have recourse to the authority of the Church. Besides, their greatest stress for the proof of it wholly lyes upon a gross and unnatural sense of words, which are capable of a far easier and more agreeable interpretation, especially when the other words, used by our B. Saviour in the blessing and consecration of the wine, are most certainly and undeniably figurative.

2. These articles are essential to the Christian faith: the doctrine of it cannot be entire without them: and besides, they were explicitly believed and assented to, as to the matter of them, from the first ages of Christianity, tho' there were some disputes raised about the terms, by which they were expressed, and a latitude used in the explication of them: and the disbelief or denial of them was justly branded with the odious name of heresie in general Councils: and the dissenters anathematized and thrust out of the communion of the Church, and the true doctrine of the Christian religion, as delivered by Christ and his Apostles, secured and established against the corruptions and innovations in after-times by publick Creeds universally received. Whereas this is a meer novel doctrine, first brought into the Church the better to establish the gross errors and superstitions relating both to the opinions and practises of Image-worship, and advancing by degrees in times of horrible ignorance and corruption of manners, till it came first to be decreed and established an article of faith by the Assessors of the Lateran Council: besides, it does no way serve or promote the interests of Christianity, but does very much prejudice it.

it, and expose it, I am sure, to the contempt of the enemies of it, both Turks and Jews, who choose rather to continue in their infidelity, than submit to it upon their first disbelieving their very senses.

3. There is a vast difference between them in respect of their subject-matter. Things relating to God are above the level of our understanding; most of our little knowledge being derived from sense, which cannot reach those objects, that are altogether abstracted from it: whereas this falls under the examination of our senses and reason: they are things we every day converse with: things we may safely pretend to judge of, as being every way proportionable to our faculties.

4. These articles of faith involve in them no true and real contradiction, as the doctrine of Transubstantiation does. The Christian religion proposes nothing to our belief, but what is possible, and therefore credible; as has been proved by several learned men of our Church against the heterodoxies and blasphemies of the Socinians: nothing, which contradicts or thwarts the common and established notions of nature: I say, the doctrine of it, as it is contained in the Scripture, and according to the ancient tradition of the Catholick Church, and the explications of the first œcumenical Councils: to both which, tradition and authority, next to the sacred Scripture, which is the rule of faith, we ought to have regard even in controversies of faith; and not as it is perplexed and entangled by the bold niceties of the School-men, who have corrupted the truth and simplicity of the Christian religion by the mixtures of the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. So that we do not limit the divine power, or deny it to be infinite, as the bigotted Romanists pretend, because we reject this figment of Transubstantiation, as a false, absurd, and contradictory doctrine, (besides the other above-mentioned exceptions, which no sophistry or cavil can honestly and truly put by,  
or

or justly satisfie) which they ought to prove to be in the number of things possible. All which we believe from the nature of this attribute, as we are obliged, that God can do.

2. The second proposition is this, that nothing can hinder the effects of God's power, if once he has willed and determined the same \*. And of this truth, both of nature and religion, the very Heathen had a fixt belief and apprehension, viz. that all opposition made against God was vain and ineffectual: and that though some, according to the fictions of their Poets, were so foolish, as well as impious, to make a war upon the Gods, and attempted to pluck Jupiter out of his throne; yet they always came by the worst, and were cast down from their hopes, and from those mountains, which they had laid one upon another to scale heaven with, to feel the revenging effects of that power, which before they had so much slighted. Here below power may be either balanced and resisted with success, or else it may be undermined or baffled by wit, and policy, and stratagems of war: and great armies have sometimes been routed and vanquished by inconsiderable numbers, and have met with shameful defeats and overthrows. But the divine power is irresistible: there is no withstanding it: the whole creation must needs tremble and sink at the presence of God: and this the proud Assyrian King was forced to confess, when he was recovered from his phrensie: Dan. iv. 35. *That the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing, and that God doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand, and say unto him, what dost thou?* So that we see, that the credibility of this article is founded not onely upon Scripture and revelation, but upon nature and right reason: which I shall more fully prove, by making good.

\* Vid. S. Clementem Romanum pag. 36, 37.

II. The second general head, that the attribute of infinite power is essentially involved in the notion and idea of God.

Power in it self is an excellence and perfection : and things are more or less valued according to the greater or lesser degrees, which they have of it. I do not mean that force and energy onely, such as is found in inanimate beings, arising from the several dispositions of matter, whereby they are apt to make those great alterations, that are in the world : because their operations are necessary, but withal limited to a few particular effects : nor such a power, as is in brute creatures, arising from the strength and quantity of animal spirits, from the temper of blood, and from the make and constitution of their bodies : but such a power, as is directed by reason, and is arbitrary and free, and may be used or not used, according as upon debate and deliberation shall be judged most convenient : such a power, as extends it self to various objects, and effectually brings to pass, what is designed in the mind, and contrived in the brain : a power, whereby a man has a full command over things, and can subject them to his will and disposal, and make use of, so as to advance himself, and get the mastery over others, and make himself be dreaded every where. Yet however such a one, who has attained a despotick power, whether rightfully by succession, or by force of arms and cruelty, or by the arts, whether of lawful or wicked, policy, may please himself with the success of his councils and stratagems and dextrous management of affairs, both in peace and war, and phantasie great matters of himself, and swell with the thoughts of his acquired greatness : he is not able to withstand the least sickness : this can soon mortifie him, and bring him upon his knees, and make him sensible of his weakness, and the folly of his pride. When God does but arm the most despicable creatures against him, and  
gives

gives them a commission to assault and invade him, the least infliction baffles and routs his hopes and confidences, gives him a fair prospect of himself and of his defects, and shews him, what a miserable creature man is at the best, who cannot secure himself of health, of happiness, of life for one moment. By this he is made to see and acknowledge, that there is something above him, to whom he is accountable, that orders and disposes of all things at his pleasure: that all that power, which is distributed among so many creatures, in such a strange variety and subordination, is derived from some supreme being, in whom it is united, and infinitely much more: and if that he withdraw his influence, or blows upon any counsel, it comes to nothing, and the designs of these mighty men, who have got the empire of the world into their hands, are soon at an end together with their lives, and they faint away, and drop into their graves, and all their thoughts perish; because all the power they have is but the communication of his will, an emanation of his providence, and an imperfect shadow of that power, by which he governs the world: all second causes being influenced by him, and acting onely by virtue of what they have received. For it is the plain and unconstrained collection of reason, that nothing has of it self a power to act, whereby it contributes to make up the harmony of the world: that their essences and the operations, flowing from them, are both limited, and are easily dissolvable by that power, which first made them; and that they have a dependence upon a being, which is infinite, and almighty, and independent. What a blot and stain would it be to that fair idea of a God, to imagine, that any thing possible could be above his power, or too hard for his omnipotence? what were this but to cloath him with the infirmities of a man, to level him with his creatures, and to take off that essential and necessary distinction

D between



between them? This power then must be infinite: for what can limit or restrain it? who can put a force upon him, or stop his procedures, when there is nothing equal and co-ordinate? can man, whose breath is in his nostrils, who a few years since had no being, and that which he has, he owes wholly to another, born an infant into the world, made to his hands: he, as soon as he comes to years, and can use his reason, and discern things, quickly perceives his weaknesses and wants, and cannot help himself. Can the united strength of other creatures? They act onely, as they are directed: all that they have is plainly borrowed, and at the disposal of him, who made them. They may be traced to their originals, and are perishable in their natures: it is the power of God, which, as at first gave, still continues to them their being.

Now to demand, why is there then no infinite effect of an infinite power? is to forget, that this implies a contradiction: infinity being an incommunicable attribute, and onely peculiar to God; and therefore the distance will ever remain infinite between the opposite terms of such a relation, as that of the Creator to the creature. But God has given sufficient displays of his power, and the effects of it are so various and innumerable, that they are convincing and demonstrative arguments of its being infinite, and that no power less than such could ever have produced them. *The invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things, that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.* i Rom. 20. We judge of worldly productive power by vast piles of building: but what is a Pyramid, or an Aquæduct, or a Colossus, or an Amphitheater, to the orderly and glorious frame of things? how pitiful and mean in comparison of the heavens? Let us cast up our eyes thither, and there behold \* the several orbs moving on in an uninterrupted order, the swiftness of their motion,

and

\* Vide hæc de  
re S. Clementem  
Romæ  
num elegantem  
differentem,  
pag. 27, 28.



and withall the greatness of their bodies, that the earth, about which poor mortals contend so much, and to get a little part and share of, which they cannot possess long, venture their quiet and their lives, and oftentimes their very souls, is but a point in respect of them: the vast distance between us and the heavens: the glorious and inexhaustible brightness of the sun and the stars, and the kind influences of them upon all things here below, and the like: and we cannot but be filled with the admiration of God, who made them. *The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament sheweth his handy work.* Let us reflect upon the situation of the earth, how it is hung upon nothing in the middle of the heavens, having no foundation to rest upon, but a magnetical vigour, imprinted by the hand of God, whereby the parts of it are so firmly united, all of them tending toward the center by an innate principle of gravity, that, if it were possible for it, according to the phansy of Archimedes, to be moved out of its place by any engine, it would return speedily to it again: the virtue and fruitfulness of it in producing those various sorts of plants, flowers, and trees, with those several minerals and metals, and other fossils, which lye hid in the bowels of it: the great variety of living creatures, which serve for the ornament and beauty of the creation: and above all, let us contemplate man: the curious make and frame of his body, and the uses of each part: but chiefly the faculties of his mind, whereby he is able to govern himself and the other creatures subject to him, and even make use of those things, which he cannot alter and change, and derive a benefit from them to himself.

Now the conclusions, naturally arising hence, are

I. That *the builder and maker of all is God*: because this frame and constitution of the world is above all created strength and power, and things could not make them-

*A Discourse concerning the*

selves, but owe their being and original to his divine will, and to his infinite power and wisdom: and

2. That he, who made the heavens, and the earth, and all things therein, who has hung up those lights in the sky, which flame so brightly: who has imprinted such a swift and unwearied motion in the stars: who has filled that vast distance of space between us and them with so subtil and perspicuous a body: who has cast the earth into such a figure, that every part of it might enjoy the influences of the heavens with the greater advantage, and as it were interchangeably and by turns: who has caused those deep channels for the waters, upon which Ships may pass from one extreme part of the world to the other, and keep up and maintain a commerce with all mankind; and the like: He can do much more: his power is not confined to any one effect: if he does but once will the same, presently a new world shall start up out of nothing. For what shall hinder? it being equally easie to an infinite and inexhaustible power to make more, as one. Who questions an Artists power, who has brought some curious piece to perfection, whether a statue, or a picture, or a watch, or a medal; but that supposing the same conveniences, he can make more according to the first model, and vary and alter it according to the several workings and movings of his phansie? and if this be so easily conceivable, and withal so agreeable to reason, who can doubt of those lesser things, which have been brought to pass in the several ages of the world: such, as are the alterations of the course of nature for a time, as *the standing still of the sun and moon*, (that disorder in the heavens, which this interruption might cause, being soon after removed, and the former regular motion restored) *the dividing of the red sea into two parts*: the waters of it rising up and standing on an heap, *the wonders of Ægypt*, and *all those stupendious miracles, wrought by our blessed Saviour*  
and

and his Apostles? for if we consider things thoroughly, as great things are done every day : but the commonness of them takes away the wonder; and makes us slight and neglect them. Let us embrace either of the two Hypotheses, it matters not. One would judge it more incredible, that so great a body, as the sun, or earth, should move at all, than that the motion of the one or other should be interrupted and stopt for some hours, but that our senses and the interchanges and vicissitudes of day and night, and the several seasons of the year, assure us of it : and it is as great, if not a greater, wonder, that the tides should be so regular and periodical according to the course of the moon, and that this flux and reflux should be made twice almost in five and twenty hours, than that the waters in a small gulph, as is the Arabian, should rise and swell as it were into a mountain, and leave part of the channel dry and bare, and to be passed over on foot. They will say, that these admirable effects are according to *nature* : a word used by these men, who are afraid to own a Deity, to very ill purposes. But what do they mean by *nature* ? Do they mean a principle of things, void of life and understanding ? but can the stately, and curious, and regular frame of things flow from such a principle ? Can that, which has no sense, or understanding, or life, or skill, be the author of such beings, which are endowed with all ? How comes it to confer that upon others, which it has not in it self ? If they say, that they mean by *nature* that order of things, which was fixt and established by God, the supreme cause, in the beginning, by which the world is ordinarily governed : why then will they deny the God of nature to be able to alter it, when it shall make for his glory ? A serious reflexion upon the ordinary works of nature will quickly silence all those doubts and scruples, which have been raised by a company of ignorant, illiterate, and debauched

bauched Atheists and Deists against the belief of the miracles recorded in the Scriptures, and confirmed by unquestionable evidence of thousands, who have seen them done, and were actually present at the doing of them, upon this foolish pretence, because they seem to contradict the present state of things, as if that could not be altered, changed, and exceeded : which is nothing less, than to limit and tie-up as it were the hands of an almighty Agent. Thus nature and reason fully and unconstrainedly give in their suffrages to the truth of this article : and certainly, tho' some shallow wits may acquiesce in second causes, and think, that they have attained their end, if they can find out some of the nighest and most immediate, and relying very vainly and presumptuously upon the supposed strength of the Atomical or Mechanical philosophy, go about with great impiety to exclude God from having any thing to do either in the making or governing the world : yet whosoever, like a wise and true Philosopher, and sober rational man, will search further into the originals of those immediate and fundamental causes of things, and carefully observe, how they are linked and tyed together ; in what excellent order ; and to what wise ends and purposes ; he will find himself under a necessity of having speedy recourse to the infinite wisdom and power of God : and therefore, as that excellent person, the Lord Verulam, observes in his Essays ; *God never wrought a miracle to convince Atheism : because his ordinary works sufficiently convince it.*

Now as it is altogether absurd to proceed upon slight and narrow principles, taken up from the observation of the present and usual state of nature, to the prejudice of the truth of miracles, which suppose it alterable, and actually at that time altered : so it argues the same presumption and folly to doubt of the possibility of a thing, and deny the great truths and principles of religion, whether

ther natural or revealed, meerly because they are above our faculties, and are not proportionable to those ideas and conceptions, which we derive from sense and the impressions of outward objects. Which is

The third general head of this discourse, which I undertook to make good : namely that

III. It is altogether unreasonable to deny the verity of the divine attributes, and limit the power of God in things possible, or refuse to submit to the belief and acknowledgment of the mysteries of faith, because they transcend either our power, or our understanding and comprehension. Which proposition I shall consider in its particular branches.

I. It is most unreasonable to lay a restraint upon God almighty, and limit his power, and deny any thing to be possible, which is no way repugnant to the essential perfections of the Godhead, and does not involve in it self a real and manifest contradiction, upon this pretense, because it transcends our power, or the whole power of created nature.

In this indeed, as I have intimated above, we have the advantage of all other creatures here below, that they act either necessarily, or else spontaneously onely \*, that is, according to natural instincts, and are hurried on to their several objects by the force and sway of their appetites, and consequently do nothing by deliberation and choice. Thus the birds build their nests spherically, and the bees are very artificial and curious in making the hony-comb, and the silk-worm and the spider spin a very fine and subtil thread : they perform the task, which the wisdom of the great Creator has set them, and are directed to those ends by his omniscience, and to those onely : for they cannot vary these actions, peculiar to each, according to their different powers. It is man onely in this visible world, tho' sent into it weak, and helpless, and unarmed,

who

\* Arynob. adv.  
gentes, lib. 2.  
Lugd. Batav.  
4<sup>o</sup>. p. 55, 56.



who, when grown up to maturity of years and judgment, by the help of his wit and reason, can conquer the other creatures, and make them serviceable to his uses, and easily master them, notwithstanding their wildness and fierceness, and hereby exercise an entire dominion over them, as being constituted Lord of the creation : who can first design and contrive, and then perform and execute, what lyes within his reach and within his view. It is by this, that he has invented that great number of instruments and engines, whereby he reaches heaven, and takes an account of the order and motion of the stars, and of their several periods and revolutions, tho' at that vast distance from them, and makes them serviceable to the measuring of his time, and directing him in his travels and voyages. It is by this, that he dares commit himself to that inconstant element, and by the directive virtue of a contemptible stone, as it appears to be, tho' more valuable for this admirable use, than all the diamonds of India, can find his way in the great ocean, where there is no track, and encompass the world from one pole to the other, and keep pace as it were with the sun in its eastern and western course. It is by this, that he raises stately mansions and fortifications, for his pleasure and defense, cuts through rocks, and joyns distant rivers and seas by artificial channels, and invents those curious manufactures, together with that great variety of other artificial productions, which serve both for ornament and convenience. And all this is done by a dextrous and skilful application of actives to passives : by framing and shaping the materials, which are made to his hands : by putting different things together, by enquiring into their nature and use : by study, and experience, and observation : by often repeated and adventurous tryals : by casting about in his thoughts, how to secure himself of success : by proceeding slowly and by degrees, according to method and order :



der : and the success has been glorious and admirable, and a new world of things has been added ; and every where, except in sandy deserts and uncultivated plains and forests, and in such countries, where the wild people are not reduced to gentleness and civility of manners, are erected monuments of mans wit and power. But how great soever this may seem, yet it is very little, and pitiful, and inconsiderable in comparison of what he does not know, and what he cannot do : thousands of things there are above his power, which neither his wit nor his arm can reach : it is not in his power to create one atome of matter : he does but disguise things all this while, and put them into new shapes. All that he can pretend to, is but to know nature ; and that very imperfectly, and to imitate it, as well as he can, and draw rough copies of that perfect original. For how rude, and homely, and inartificial are the best pieces of the ablest Artists, if compared with the curiousness, with the neatness, with the beauty of natural compositions ! These are so curious and admirable, wrought with such excellent and extraordinary skill, that the most sagacious and inquisitive cannot fully comprehend them. All things are so exactly and geometrically fitted to their proper uses, even the least fibre, and the minutest particle, tho' imperceptible to the naked eye : there being nothing idle and useless in nature. There is so much accuracy and perfection in the meanest and most contemptible pieces of the creation, that the more a wise man, a Philosopher, considers, the more he is at a loss : and the result of his serious thoughts, after they have been long busied and tired out in the search, is this, that they are all the works of a divine hand, guided by an infinite wisdom. Thus every considering man, even by a slight, much more serious and deliberate, contemplation of nature, cannot but be fully satisfied and convinced, that there is an all-powerful being, which has wrought all

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these glorious effects : or else such a one, if yet such a silly creature, which has the shape, and pretends to the reason of a man, can be found, must fall into this prodigious and irrational error, which no one can be guilty of without the just imputation of phrensie, that all that he sees, is not the production of contrivance and design, but meerly of accidental hits, strugglings, and conjunctions of little particles of matter, floating up and down in an infinite empty space : that things fell into this admirable order and frame, which has distracted and confounded the wits of all ages fully to understand and make out satisfactorily, at first as it were of their own accord, as if they had had life, and sense, and power to determine their own motions, and mutually agreed to do this, having first made themselves : or which is as gross and foolish a phantasie, (though herein the Aristotelean Atheist thinks himself a fine wit and a subtil arguer in comparison of the Atheists of the Epicurean sect) that they are improduced and eternal : that the sun moves in the Ecliptic to the great advantage and benefit of the world, and not in the Æquator, or in any of the Parallel Circles, meerly because it happened so after long shiftings and infinite irregularities of motion : and that it still keeps the same course as it were out of choise, and sympathy, and good nature. But now how difficult, how false, how ridiculous, to say nothing of the impiety of it, must such a way of arguing and procedure be, to judge of God by our narrow scantlings of wit and strength, to measure his power by our weakness, and the good, or ill success of our endeavours and undertakings : when we are ignorant of the utmost strength of nature ; what may be done by the conjunction and combination of several beings ; how and in what manner they may operate one upon another ; and what effects they may produce : and especially, if we reflect, that many things have been

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pronounced impossible, and given over as such, that is, in respect of us, and not in the nature of the things themselves, and for the wit and art of man to effect, which have been discovered by the industry of after-times. Why then should any man pronounce a thing impossible, which involves in it no repugnancy to actual existence, and hereby pretend to overthrow the doctrine and faith of miracles, because they are above the strength of nature? when the power of God, as has been proved, is immense and infinite: and by the same argument he may as madly conclude, notwithstanding his high-flown pretensions of arguing according to the principles of strict reason, several things in the world, nay the world it self, not to be made, and maintain dull and stupid matter to have been eternal: which is a manifest gross absurdity: meerly upon this supposal, because if they were made, they must be made by a power above natural and humane.

2. It is most unreasonable to reject the articles of revealed religion and the mysteries of faith, because we cannot fully comprehend them. Before these men, whether Deists, or Socinians, renounce the belief of such articles and mysteries, let them try their reason in explaining the difficulties of nature: let them resolve all those Problemes, if they can, which have exercised the Philosophers of all ages: and if upon trial they cannot satisfy themselves or others in those ordinary phenomena, where they have their senses to assist them: if they cannot tell, how things are done, which are done daily: if many of the ordinary operations of nature be abstruse and unintelligible: if they cannot trace her in all her labyrinths and windings, and are quite tired, and forced at last to give over the pursuit: if plain matters of sense cannot be fully accounted for: why should they presume upon the strength of their little knowledge, and make their reason the measure and standard of divine truth, allowing that

only to be true and certain which suits with it? He is very unfit to judge of any piece of art, suppose a picture or a watch, who knows nothing of design or clock-work; and especially at first view, without taking notice of the several strokes and lines, and the proportion of the parts of the one, or the hidden springs and wheels of the other, which give it that orderly and regular motion. And if an Artist reject their judgment, as foolish and incompetent, because grounded on no principles of knowledge and skill: shall we not much more reject these mens either bold determination or peremptory denial of things, which they neither understand, nor have thoroughly considered? such, as pretend, that they cannot believe either a creation, because they cannot tell how to admit of a vast empty space, before the world was made, or how it should be made, no matter pre-existing; or a resurrection, because they cannot see how the scattered atomes of dust shall rally and reunite, and constitute the same man again: such, as disbelieve the articles of the Christian faith, because they cannot form clear ideas, and full and comprehensive notions of them: and upon the same pretense these very men, who will believe nothing, but what they can make out and demonstrate by reason, will, if they follow their own principle, quickly commence down-right Atheists, and deny God to be infinite, omniscient, and eternal: of which necessary and essential attributes of the divine nature we cannot have complete and adequate conceptions, our narrow faculties being no way capable of it. But if there be such a vast difference between man and man, upon the account of education, industry, experience, learning, and the several ways of advancing and improving reason and the natural faculties of the mind: if the conceptions of things be clear, easie, and distinct in some, without wracking or straining the phansie, which are  
clouded

clouded, perplexed, and confused in others, by reason of some natural or accidental hinderances and disadvantages, through dulness and stupidity, or settled prejudice : if we are ignorant of the possibilities of nature, and cannot tell, how far and in what manner natural causes may act : what can be more unreasonable and unjust, than for a man, whose knowledge is scanty, and power confined within a narrow circle, and who is so apt to mistake in his judgment of things, to oppose his reason to God's infinite wisdom, as if it were equally clear and comprehensive ; to pretend, that his conceptions are the adequate measures of truth ; and that God can do no more, than what he, poor finite shallow creature, is able to think ; and to reject clear and express revelations of God concerning himself, upon the account of a phansied incongruity and a seeming repugnancy to his reason ? If the creatures, which are of a different order of being from us, cannot at all, much less fully, understand and comprehend what we do according to the dictates of reason and wisdom, and the results of deliberate counsel and study : because life, and sense, and animal motion are not able to reach so far, without the assistance of an higher and nobler faculty : what an unpardonable piece of arrogance is it for a man to think his reason able to comprehend the things of God, when there is such an infinite disproportion between them ; and call in question the truth of the divine revelations ; and measure all by this crooked and deceitful rule, whether it be agreeable to his phansie or not ? It is a most rational and infallible ground of faith, that God, who has revealed these mysteries, cannot utter a falshood. It is more certain than demonstration, if God has once said it. There are some monsters in the world, whose lusts and debaucheries have suggested to them doubts about the being of God, and the truth of his attributes : and a consciousness of their guilt has made them



them with, that there were none. No one was ever found, who acknowledged a God, and did not at the same time acknowledge, that he was just and true. Pythagoras found no opposition, when he taught, that there were two things, by which men became like to God ; *ἐν τῷ ἀληθεύειν καὶ ἐν τῷ ἐργεῖσθαι*, by speaking truth and doing good : both perfections naturally streaming from the divine nature. So that upon the whole matter it will appear, that it is nothing but pride and a presumptuous conceit of mastering all the difficulties of religion by the strength of reason, which put them upon the denial of these revealed truths, and that this pride and presumption are altogether unjust and unreasonable. Which was the thing to be proved.

From this necessary, essential, and fundamental notion of the divine power, these following inferences, relating to practise, may most certainly be drawn :

1. That we are to repose our whole trust and confidence in God, whose power is infinite.

We naturally fly in case of distress and danger to a power, which is able to protect and relieve us. There is no man, but needs a support some time or other. Men are not always able of themselves to resist successfully the assaults of envy and malice : but this way envy may be at last conquered, and enemies brought over and reconciled, or else defeated. Let this therefore be the great comfort of our minds, that God is both able and ready to assist us in our utmost and greatest dangers, and in all the particular difficulties and distresses of our lives, which may befall us. It was a reflexion upon this, which made David break out into those triumphant expressions : Psalm xlv. 1, 2, 3. *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble : therefore will we not fear, tho' the earth be moved : and tho' the mountains be*  
*carried*

carried into the midst of the sea : tho' the waters roar and be troubled & tho' the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. And v. 7. *The Lord of hosts is with us : the God of Jacob is our refuge.*

2. That we are to stand in fear and awe of God, and do nothing, which may displease him.

Fear is a passion, which usually results from a reflexion upon power : and according to the nature and degrees of it, the fear will rise and encrease proportionably ; and therefore the power of God, who is able to punish us eternally, is a most rational ground of fear. S. Luke xii. 4, 5. says our B. Saviour to his disciples ; *Be not afraid of them, who kill the body, and after that have no more, that they can do : but I will forewarn you, whom you shall fear ; fear him, who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell : yea, I say unto you, fear him.* And with this argument the heroic woman encouraged her young son to endure the torments and cruelties of Antiochus, as his six brothers had done before him, rather than save his life by violation of the divine law : *I beseech thee, my son, look upon the heaven, and upon the earth, and all that is therein : and consider, that God has made them of things, that were not ; and so was mankind made likewise. Fear not this tormentor, but being worthy of thy brethren, take thy death, that I may receive thee again in mercy with thy brethren :* as you may read the tragical history in the second book of Maccabees, chap. vii. Whosoever reflects seriously \* on God's infinite power, will never pre-  
sumptuously do such things, as may draw on him his displeasure : and upon a true sense of his guilt, will be restless, till by repentance and a good life he is reinstated in the love and favour of God.

\* Vide S. Clementem, p. 37.

3. That

*A Discourse concerning the*

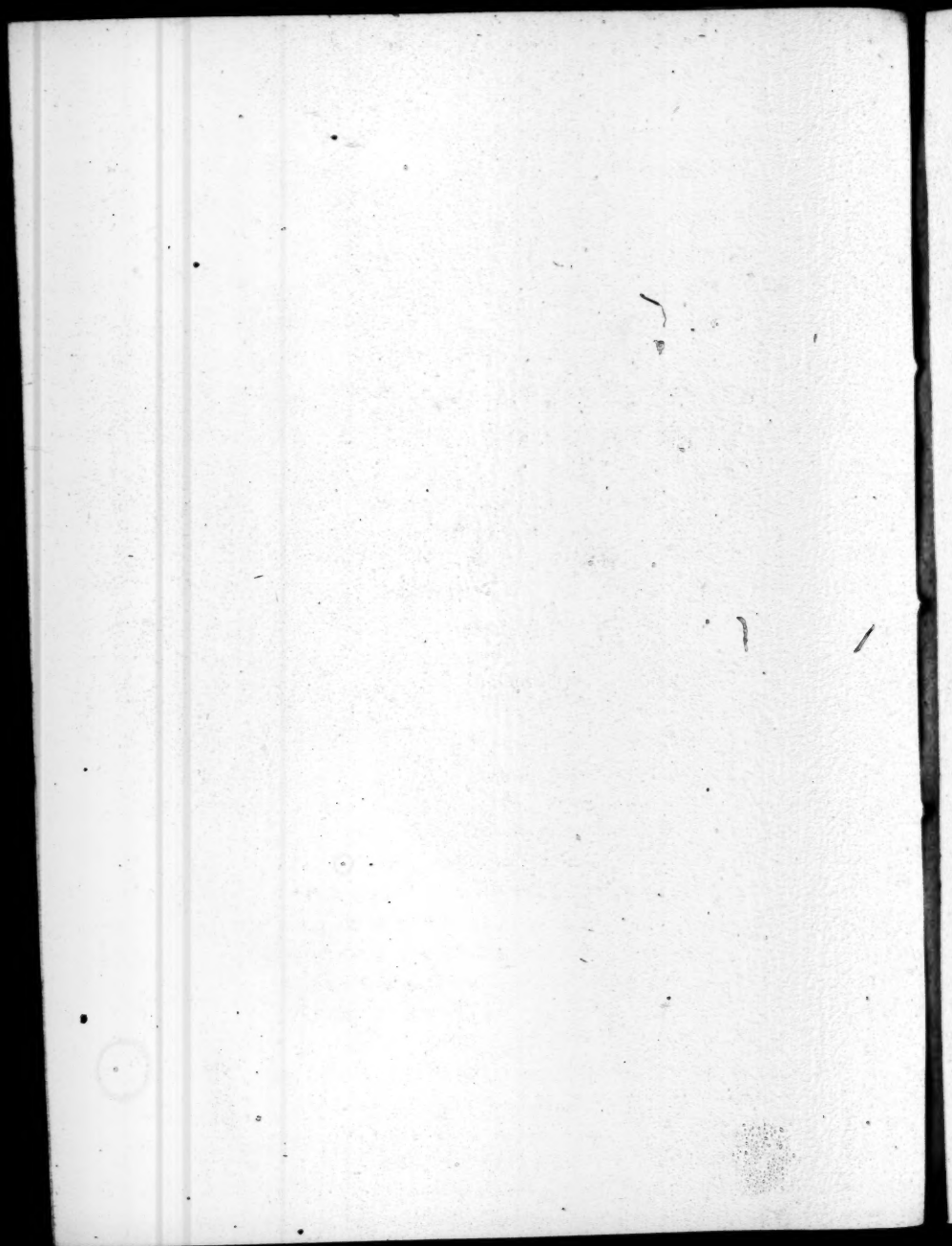
3. That the sense of our weakness and defects should teach us humility and modesty in our enquiries into the great mysteries of religion : there being as great reason for us to submit our understanding to the revealed truths of Scripture, as our will to its commands. He, who religiously adores and believes a God, and acknowledges him to be a being infinitely perfect, will not dare to question the truth of his revelations : and as firmly will he believe, that all those promises and threats, which are contained in the holy Scriptures, which have a reference to a future state, shall one day be fulfilled. For with what pretense can any one doubt or disbelieve their fulfilling, who reflects upon God's truth and power ? All doubt or distrust arises from a double cause, either because men are not real in what they say, and so intend it not : or else want power to make their words good : neither of which can possibly have any place here. For God is a God of infinite veracity, and all his promises are infallibly real and firm : and he is able to perform them. We value not indeed those menaces, which are the effects of an impotent passion ; when we are out of their power, and when they cannot reach us : but there will be no flying from God : his eye and hand will find and lay hold on us, wherever we are. He, who made me at first, and placed the several parts of my body in that comely order, in which they stand, and which from time to time in *continuance* and in the succession of a few months were *fashioned, when as yet there was none of them*, he can raise up this very body at the last day, and will raise it up : and of this I cannot pretend to have the least rational doubt, were it ten thousand times more difficult to conceive, than it is : because he has absolutely promised it, and his veracity is obliged for it, and his infinite power can easily make it good. Does God threaten impenitent and incorrigible sinners with everlasting tor-  
ment

ment in hell ; I with trembling submit to the truth of this threatning : because he can easily continue a creature in a miserable being, unconsumed, and that for ever : and I know he will do it, because he has said it. And upon this belief and assurance we are to provide accordingly, that so we may avoid the strokes, the fierceness, the terribleness of his revenging hand, and may partake of those most glorious promises, which his goodness and mercy in Christ our Saviour has made over to us in this life, and which his infinite power will make good to us for ever in the next.

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A  
**DISCOURSE**  
 ABOUT THE  
 CERTAINTY and EVIDENCE  
 OF A  
**Future State.**

**H**OW much it is below a man to busie himself wholly in the pursuit of earthly things, whether honour, wealth, or pleasure; and how contemptible a creature he is, notwithstanding all his acquits of outward greatness, unless he does raise his mind to the contemplation of better and nobler objects, whosoever will reflect seriously upon the nature and faculties of the mind, by which he is enabled to discourse, and reason, and judge of things and of their consequences, unless he is utterly forsaken by his reason, and governed by brutal appetite, will be forced to acknowledge. Besides, there are such continual changes and vicissitudes of things here below, so much uncertainty in them, and withal, so little satisfaction to the rational desires of the soul, such intermixtures of good and evil, ebbs and flows of prosperity,

F 2.

*A Discourse about the certainty*

perity, sickness, and discontent, and disappointments, and various anxieties, arising from irregular passion and distemper of blood and humours, and a thousand evil accidents, which no wisdom or care can prevent, notwithstanding the flattering intervals of health, and ease, and pleasurable self-enjoyment, taking up the greatest part of our lives, and death at last, after three or fourscore years at most, seizing upon us, that, even according to the judgment of natural reason, and the more refined Heathen have acknowledged it, the condition of humane life would be very miserable, and all things considered, inferior to that of other creatures, if there were no life hereafter in another world. Nay, amidst those corrupt principles, which barbarousness and sensuality had super-induced among the wilder sort of Heathen, immersed in blind and stupid ignorance, and destitute of all helps and methods of knowledge and learning, they yet retained a belief and expectation of another state after this life: this could not be wholly effaced out of their minds and memories: these thoughts pursued them, wherever they went: and, when they met with violence and hardship, and were oppressed by the irresistible strength of invaders, and suffered unjustly, in all these straits and difficulties, they comforted themselves with faint hopes of it: and tho' they could not by reason of fatal prejudices and prepossessions, taken up from sense, and of the want of the true knowledge of God, and his attributes, have any just apprehension or notion of the resurrection of the body, yet they all concluded unanimously for the life, and being, and subsistence of the soul.

So that the wild and savage people of Afric and America, as well as the more civilized, and cultivated by philosophy and the discipline of laws, give in full evidence against the Atheistical wits of the age, who with an unparalleled boldness maintain, that when a man has acted his part in this life, he goes off the stage, and disappears for ever,

ever, that the soul like a flame, when the matter, which fed it, is spent, is wholly extinguished, and *vanishes into soft air*; that we came into the world by meer chance, and shall be hereafter, as tho' we had never been: as the Author of the book of Wisdom elegantly brings in the Gallants of his time triumphing and entertaining themselves with such idle, phantastick, and irrational hopes; chap. ii. 2. and that when a man dyes, there is an utter end of him, a dissolution of soul as well as body, every element taking its own, and the whole swallowed up in the universal mass of matter, out of which it was at first made: singing out with the chorus in Seneca's Troas:

*Quæris quo jaceas post obitum loco?*

*Quo non nata jacent.*

and,

*Post mortem nihil est, ipsaque mors nihil.*

But it ought not to be expected, as to the Heathen, that they, whose eyes were dim and weak, and who were involved in thick clouds and mists of ignorance, should have a clear view and prospect of another world, and that those heavenly objects should appear to them, whose understandings were darkned with false notions and principles, in their full brightness. However, it is most certain, that they did believe a life after this: and made it the great incentive and encouragement of virtue and courage in dying for their country: and when they did ill, and that in the dark, with all possible secrecy and undisturbance, and with all security, under no restraint of law, or fear of punishment; yet their hearts misgave them, and in private and alone they dreaded the evil effects and consequences of their guilt. I am not backward to acknowledge, that this opinion, belief, and expectation of another life, might be oftentimes clogg'd in the

the best of them with mixtures of doubts: the prepossessions of sense stifling the dictates of right reason and the suggestions of natural conscience. Even that excellent person, Socrates, who was one of the first among the Greeks, who freed his reason from the entanglement of vulgar opinions in matters of religion and moral philosophy, which the corrupt Theology of their Poets had introduced, and who died as it were a Martyr for the unity of the Godhead, spake somewhat doubtfully of it in the discourse he had with his friends, the very day of his death: the sum of which is preserved by Plato in his dialogue, entitled *Phædo*, or *of the soul*. He said, *he would not be positive and dogmatical*: but however he profest his hope, that he should pass immediately to the company of those good men, who died before him, whose souls survived in some happy place he knew not where. This was far from the heroick and steady assurance of *S. Paul*, who after his second appearance before Nero, when he saw, that there was nothing but death to be expected from the Tyrant and his bloody Officers, triumphs in his neer approaches to it, as the entrance to a blessed immortality. 2 Tim. ii. 6, 7, 8. *I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight: I have finished my course: I have kept the faith: henceforth is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day.* He seemed as sure of it, as if he had had the crown upon his head, and had been actually in heaven. What Philosophy can scarce reach, being at that vast distance from it, that Christianity easily discovers. Reason is the same in all mankind; but reason, assisted by revelation, is like the eye armed with a Telescope: it not only sees things clearer and better, but discovers new objects; such as before lay hid, and were indiscernible to the naked sight. A Christian man, that is, if he be more so, than in profession, and if his immoralities

Plato in Phædo.  
done. edit.  
Cantabr. 8<sup>o</sup>.  
1673.

Τὸ τοῦτο εἶναι αὐτὸ  
τὸ αὐτὸ διὰ τὴν ἀρετήν  
μὴν. pag. 82.

lities have not altogether corrupted his mind, and plunged him into the very dregs of infidelity, cannot at all doubt of a future state. He looks upon himself as a pilgrime, and is travelling toward a better country, that is, a heavenly: *here he has no continuing city, but looks for one to come.* His hopes are fixed elsewhere: and the doctrine of faith assures him of the certainty and reality of his hopes, and plentifully affords him good and well settled and unmoveable grounds, upon which his expectation is founded.

But setting aside the proofs from the clear, and full, and uncontrollable revelations of Scripture concerning the different states and conditions of happiness and misery in the other world: as having now to do with men, who throw off all belief of the sacred writings of the Prophets and Apostles, and reject their authority; in order to their conviction I will only make use of arguments drawn from the principles of reason and of natural religion, which they pretend to admit and embrace, in proving, that there are things to be hoped for and feared in another world; that is, that there are rewards and punishments to be distributed hereafter according to our good or ill behaviour in this life: and that a full, and positive, and satisfactory proof of this is derivable from the nature of things, and that such evidence is sufficient, and cannot with any shew or pretense of reason be rejected.

I shall only by way of preliminary lay down this following proposition, of the truth of which these men cannot but be fully sensible; *viz.* that the belief of this natural truth, so universally received, that is, in all ages and among all nations, is very conducive to, and has a mighty influence upon, the well-being of the world.

It is indeed one of the grand bases and principles of all religion, whether natural, or prescribed by positive institution. If all things were to end here, and no expectation



tion of any thing future, men would little care to be virtuous or religious for virtues or religions sake. For tho' to live virtuously and religiously, that is, according to the law of nature and the law of God, be agreeable to our rational faculties, and creates a greater joy and serenity in the mind, than what all earthly, sensual, and brutal pleasures, enjoyed to their full height, can afford, and consequently does carry along with it its own reward: yet it is justly to be feared, that the satisfaction of having done ones duty would be judged meager and empty in respect of those gross delights of the senses, and be lookt upon as the effect of melancholy and chagrin, and it may be, of mistake and folly; and that religion would have but few votaries upon this noble and generous principle. The only business then of life would be how to be rich and great: strength would be the law of justice, and right and title measured out by the longest sword. Innocence would be no security against oppression and violence; but rather their sport and prey. Luxury would go hand in hand with ambition: pleasures, tho' never so unmanly and impure, should be wanting to no sense: the appetite should be sated with wine and lust, and then raised again with charming incentives and provocatives. Men would play the beasts more solemnly, make the whole creation administer to their wantonness and riot, and spend their whole time in the excesses of extravagant mirth and jollity. Conscience, alas, and honesty would be accompted meer empty names: corrupt interest and policy would raise themselves upon the ruins of religion and morality. Deceit and evil arts should soon take place, where there was no hope of prevailing by open force. A mans own will, were it never so unreasonable, should be the onely rule of his life: and the gratification of an irregular appetite should be the onely law of his mind.

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Next, the belief of this fundamental truth is the great and necessary support of government. It is like the middle stone of an arch, which sustains the whole building: it keeps the world from falling into confusion, and relapsing into its original chaos. All government would quickly beat an end: laws would not have sufficient strength to hold men in to their duty; at least, they would be like spiders webbs, onely proper to entangle petty offenders, who could not break through them. They would no longer obey, than they were forced: they would be impatient of living under such restraints, which, as some of our modern Virtuosi pretend, abridge them of their natural liberty: and if so, they were to be treated like wild beasts, and pent up in dens and caves from doing mischief. Every man would pretend to have a right to every thing: and Mr. Hobbs's absurd and phantastic hypothesis about the state of nature would be really introduced into the world by innumerable instances and examples of cruelty and injustice, to the shame of humane nature, and utter overthrow of humane race. Such continued clashings and fightings would be more fatal and pernicious, than plagues, hurricanes, earthquakes, and inundations, and would quickly dispeople the earth of all its inhabitants. It is the belief of another world, which secures government, preserves authority, and gives strength to laws.

Fear and hope have a great influence upon our lives: they are very imperious passions, and shew their power sufficiently in all the great transactions of mankind, which are done with reason and design. They are natural to us, and will never forsake us: and their strength increaseth proportionably, according to the nature, and quality, and degrees of those rewards and punishments, on which they are fixt. Now if these rewards and punishments

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were only temporary, if after death there were nothing further to be feared or hoped for, men would not value the utmost severity of law, to gratifie a passion, suppose lust or revenge: they would willingly run the hazard of dying, so as that they might either enjoy their extravagant phantasies, or ruine and dispatch their enemy: death in it self being not so terrible, (the fear of which several passions can easily overcome) but as it is a passage to eternity. He, who is grown so desperate, as not to value his own life, is easily master of another mans: and nothing could deter such an one from acting the greatest villany imaginable.

But now, if there be rewards and punishments after this life ended, if these rewards and punishments be everlasting, if these everlasting rewards and punishments be dispensed and proportioned according to the actions and behaviours of men here in this world, if this be certain, and if it be believed and expected as certain, the just and well grounded hope of future happiness will powerfully perswade and incite us to the practises of a virtuous and holy life; and the fear and dreadful expectation of future endless misery will as powerfully deter us from the commission of those wickednesses, which render us justly obnoxious to such punishments. For who would not be happy for ever, if he either might or could? who in his right wits and calm thoughts would be content to be miserable to eternal ages? who would make it his choice to be damned, if he might avoid it?

Now as to the proof of a future state from the principles of natural religion, the certainty and evidence of it are founded on the justice of God and his governing power: which render it undeniably necessary.

Nothing perplext the minds of the ancient Philosophers more, than to see righteous and virtuous men often-

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times afflicted and oppressed, and the wicked and dissolute prosperous and triumphant. No phenomenon whatever, which they pretended might be solved and accounted for by their several hypotheses, without interesting a Deity at all in their solutions, troubled them so much, as this: these difficulties were great and perplexed, and disagreeable, as they thought, to the common notions of reason, equity, and justice, imprinted upon their minds: so that in the tumultuous workings of their thoughts, they began to question, whether God (for such a supreme being they could not, they durst not deny) had any thing to do in the government of the world, who permitted such disorders, and seemed so unconcerned. But upon wise thoughts and sedate deliberation they quickly recovered, and generally condemned the doctrine of Epicurus, and readily acknowledged, that all the great revolutions, that were in the world, all the odd and strange events of things, and the different conditions of life, as to good and evil, so seemingly repugnant to the rules of right and wrong, were for wise ends and purposes permitted to come to pass: that there was a sovereign infinite being, who governs the world according to his will and pleasure; and that all things are subject to the rules and laws of his wisdom and providence. This, after all their researches into the causes and reasons of things, notwithstanding the great difficulties, wherewith they had been entangled, was generally acknowledged by them, as the voice and dictate of universal nature and clear and right reason. The Schools of all the sober Masters and Professors of Philosophy, both at Athens and Rome, sounded with this doctrine: and all, who pretended to virtue, and honour, and understanding, very few excepted, embraced it. It was to the belief of this prime truth, and the practises of religion grounded upon it, that the wise

\* Cicero in his Oration, de Haruspicio responfis, which he pronounced in the Senate. *Quam volumus licet, P. C. ipsi nos amemus: tamen nec numero Hispanos, nec calliditate Pœnos, nec robore Gallas, nec artibus Græcos, nec denique hoc ipso hujus gentis ac terræ domestico nativæque sensu, Italos ipsos ac Latinos: sed pietate & religione, atque hac una sapientia, quod Deorum immortalium numine omnia regi gubernarique perspeximus, omnes gentes nationesque superavimus.*

and judicious \* Cicero ascribed the astonishing success of the Roman Arms in the several distant parts of the then known world, where their victorious eagles percht; that it was not, because they were more numerous, or excelled either in the arts of policy, or in the art of war, (as if the Galls or the Carthaginians had been inferiour to them in valour and discipline, for they had had frequent experience of the contrary, and had been sadly distressed by both;

and Brennus and Hannibal were names, which had made Rome to tremble, or as if the other nations, as the Greeks, or the Spaniards, or even their own neighbours and countrymen, the Italians and Latines themselves, whom they conquered, and brought under the jurisdiction of their imperial City, were not so numerous, or not so cunning and ingenious, and excellent in discipline and civil arts and accomplishments of life) *sed pietate atque religione, atque hac una sapientia, quod Deorum immortalium numine omnia regi gubernarique perspeximus: but in piety and religion, and in this peculiar wisdom, that they acknowledged, that the great affairs of the world, and all things in it, were governed and over-ruled by a Deity.* This truth they retained, notwithstanding the grievous errors, which they had taken up concerning the multiplicity of inferior Gods, and the horrible and shameful scandals of their idolatrous worship. But our improved reason, enlightned with the knowledge of the true God, does more fully and clearly, upon just and easie reflexions, prove and make manifest to us, that God, who created the universe, is an alwise God, holy, just, and true; that righteousness is essential to his nature; that nothing comes to pass, or can  
come.



come to pass without his appointment, at least without his permission ; that what now seems disorder and chance, is wise contrivance and design ; and that all the confusions brought upon the world, tend to illustrate God's wisdom and power, who can and will bring beauty and order out of them.

If all things then in the world are under a law, the law of their respective natures, and act according to the established laws of their creation ; and if there be an over-ruling providence seen every where : man certainly, who is capable of a law, by reason of his intellectual faculties and liberty of will, cannot be supposed left to himself, to act, as he wantonly pleaseth, without being accountable to a superior power. He, who made him, and continues his being to him, has a right to govern him, that is, may, if he will, lay down laws and rules for the right ordering of his life : and he has actually done so : and every man is conscious to himself, that he is obliged by virtue of his creation and dependence upon God to obey that law. Now it is not so much the equity, the agreeableness, the advantage, or necessity of a law, as the sanction, which makes it to be obeyed, and preserves it inviolable. If God then be the governour of the world, and particularly of mankind, and if he governs man according to the laws and rules of justice, the necessary and fundamental maxims of government will oblige us to believe, that he will accordingly reward and punish. *There is one Law-giver, who is able to save, and to destroy.* But we see daily, how the laws of God are violated, and that the violators of them oftentimes escape unpunished in this life : and we know, what ill use impatient and inconsiderate men have made of this forbearance and long-suffering of God. Is not blood-thirsty cruelty, for instance, a manifest breach of the law natural

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ral and divine? that multitudes of innocent persons should be sacrificed to the revengeful and wanton humour of a Tyrant; which was the case of the primitive Christians during the reigns of the heathen Roman Emperours: who does not detest as impious and inhumane? yet how many of them, who have been guilty of this barbarity, have left the world without any mark of the divine vengeance upon them? they having had whole armies to defend them, and assist them in their outrageous and bloody massacres. Who is not concerned for the sufferings of good men in all ages? when they are dead, they are pitied per chance, and men weep over their graves, and celebrate their memories with anniversary orations, and speak great things in praise of their courage and virtue, which no opposition, no trouble whatever, no not death it self, could tire out and overcome. This is all the reward, which they have in this world: and certainly in it self a very poor one, tho' justly due to their name and memory. But while they lived, oftentimes they were *destitute, afflicted, tormented*, wanting the conveniencies of life, exposed to extreme poverty, and to *cruel mockings and scourgings, wandering about in deserts and mountains*, and retiring to dens and caves for shelter; and outlawed by sanguinary edicts from the society of mankind: and at other times condemned to the flames, or to wild beasts in their Amphitheatres, or to gibbets and crosses, or to wracks and wheels, and such like cruel deaths, with all possible ignominy, as well as torment. Does not the justice of God make it necessary, that there be a distribution of rewards and punishments hereafter, according as every one deserves? Can the government of a most holy and alwise God be supposed imperfect and defective in so necessary a part of it, as is distributive justice? Can God be thought to give laws on purpose, that

that they might be broken, and to reward the breakers of them, and to have no regard to those, who conscientiously obey them? This most certainly evinceth, that there must be another life after this, wherein God will vindicate the honour of his justice and providence, which now seemingly suffer, and do himself right in the sight of all mankind. If there be a God, there will be a future state, because God cannot be otherwise than just: For tho' he hath an absolute power over his creatures, yet he governs them according to rules of eternal rectitude and justice, and has declared from heaven his wrath and indignation against all unrighteousness of men, which is the transgression of those rules, and his veracity, as well as his justice, will oblige him to make it good.

If it be said, that this evidence of reason is not so clear and convincing, as that, which ariseth from Mathematical demonstration, or the attestation of sense, tho' it should be granted, nothing can be gained by it to the prejudice of the truth and certainty of this doctrine: which I shall shew in these two particulars:

I. That this evidence of reason is fully satisfactory of it self.

II. That in a matter of this nature no other evidence can or ought to be expected.

I. That this evidence of reason is fully satisfactory of it self, will appear hence, because it is highly irrational to doubt or deny such proofs, as are grounded upon the evidence of reason, meerly upon this pretense, that the evidence of Mathematical demonstration and of sense is clearer. For tho' all the maxims and postulata of Geometry, with the several Theoremes and Problemes built upon them, be in themselves so clear and evident, as that  
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upon a right perception either of the terms, or of the manner of construction, we readily and easily yield our assent to them without the least demur: and tho' the judgment of sense be certain, that is, when nothing, requisite to make the sensation perfect, is wanting: yet the Sceptick has called in question the truth of both, upon this foolish pretense, that for ought he knows, and can be throughly convinced of, all this Mathematical evidence may be a fatal and settled delusion: that it is possible, that a man may be most deceived, when he thinks himself most assured: that the collections and inferences of what we call reason may be false and deceitful: that the impressions, which material objects make upon the phansie, may be onely chimerical: that when we see and hear, and discourse, we may but onely think so: that we have as little certainty of things, when we are awake, and are very attentive and serious, as when we are asleep and dream: and that our whole life may be but one continued scene of phansie and imagination. So that the most common, and universal, and establisht truths of nature may be, and have been called in question by subtil Sophisters, who have a mind to cavil. But who does not deride and condemn such scepticism as very silly and irrational? Men are not to be perswaded or disputed out of their senses, and their belief of first notions, by such idle and phantastick suppositions: the possibility of the truth of which is overthrown several ways, as, by the reflexions, which the understanding makes upon it self, whereby we clearly know what we know: by our acting according to deliberation and fixt principles: by our being conscious to our selves of the continued and repeated actions of our lives: by confirmed and undoubted experience, that, tho' we are deceived, when our outward senses are suspended by sleep,  
and

and the phansie takes a liberty to amuse us with a thousand various shapes and figures, and sometimes with strange conjunctions of things, which neither exist, nor can possibly exist, we make certain conclusions from our awakened senses, when we have the full and entire use and exercise of them: and because it is inconceivable, either how such a delusion should arise of it self, and be essential to the nature of man; or how that God should suffer it; that is, that he, who is of infinite truth, and wisdom, and justice, should force us by the very constitution of our nature to believe a lye, and embrace error under the semblance of truth: and that too without any help or means of discovering our being convinced of our mistake, or at least should leave us to such great uncertainties, that we should have no ~~rule~~ <sup>method</sup> or rule to distinguish between, and discern truth from falsehood, and that he should give us reason and sense for no other end or use, but to deceive us, at least to perplex and distract us with doubts and scruples, whether we understand and see, when we both understand and see.

The certainty and clearness of Mathematical demonstration (as also of such propositions, as are said to be *eternæ veritatis*) ariseth hence, because it is conversant about things abstracted from matter, or, rather to speak more clearly and distinctly, it is founded in the essential notions and properties of things, which have an inseparable dependence upon and connexion one with another, without any regard to their actual existence; as that all the lines drawn from the center of a circle to the circumference are equal; and that the whole is greater than any of its parts: which is infallibly and universally certain; it being essential to the nature of a thing, considered as entire and whole, to be made up of many parts united and connected together, and therefore necessarily

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greater

greater than any one of those parts actually divided or conceived divided from it. And the like is to be said of all the essential attributes and properties of a sphere, cylinder, ellipsis, or any other Geometrical figure whatever: tho' there were no exactly spherical, cylindrical, or elliptical body in nature, or could be framed such by the power of art. Such speculative truths carry in themselves their own evidence: and the understanding very readily assents to them: and let me add, the more readily, not only, because it would be the effect either of a natural or shamefully absurd stupidity to deny such evidence, which would be the same thing, as to maintain gross and palpable contradictions; but also because it is no mans interest to do so. For nothing is more certain, than that interest oftentimes rejects the clear results of reason; than that the judgment is oftentimes enclined to pass a wrong sentence, even against knowledge and just proof of the contrary, in favour of a false opinion, if it be advantageous; that what we do not like, and is disagreeable to our designs, does not easily get admittance within us: we demur upon it, and raise difficulties and doubts, and pretend, that we cannot understand it; when the true reason is, it makes against us, and therefore we will not. And this is one great reason, why the Atheists and Deists set themselves against the fundamental truths of religion, and labour so much to confirm themselves in their infidelity, by making use of their wit and the little reason, that is left them, to find out new difficulties, and raise objections, to justify and defend themselves in their unbelief, in opposition to the rational, wise, and just sentiments of good men, whom they most absurdly represent under the nickname of *Believers*, that is, credulous. For these men are fully convinced, that their practises are altogether inconsistent with such professions: that if they admit these truths,



truths, they must quit their present course of life, unless they could have the patience to live under the anguish of self-condemnation, which would turn all their luscious enjoyments into gall and wormwood : that if there be a God, and that his power and justice are equally infinite, he is to be feared and adored : (for who would dare to live in open defiance of his laws, and blaspheme him daily, who believes, that he can punish him eternally for such defiance and blasphemy ?) and that if there be a future state, they must not then live like the beasts, which perish, and which are altogether unconcerned in it. But the pleasures of the animal life have corrupted their minds : they are immersed in sensuality : they have given up themselves to be governed by their appetite : to gratify that is their only study and business : it is death to them to think of a sober, restrained, and mortified kind of life : it is not their interest, they know, as the case stands with them, to believe, that there is a heaven or an hell : and therefore we need not wonder, if they cry out, that they see no force in this or that argument, in which the whole world has hitherto acquiesced, as just and satisfactory, to convince their judgment. Nothing will content them, but Mathematical evidence and demonstration : tho' it may very justly be feared, that if the evidence, they so foolishly call for, were prejudicial to the end and purposes of life, which they pursue, they would deny even that too.

II. No other kind of evidence in the case of a future state can or ought to be expected or demanded. And the reason is, because the subject-matter is not capable of it. There are different ways of proving things agreeable to their respective natures, both in Metaphysics, Natural Philosophy, Ethics, and the like ; of the conclusions of

which, fairly deduced according to the laws of method, there can be no just doubt: every science being built upon certain general principles and rules, taken up, either from experience and observation, or else drawn from the common notices and consent of mankind. Often repeated trials and experiments, which have succeeded well, sufficiently convince us of the truth of several things, which we will not pretend to demonstrate. If a matter of fact, in it self not unlikely, much less impossible, be confirmed by credible witnesses, or by authentic records, it would be a very strange piece of niceness in us, to deny the truth of it, and call for demonstration: because we have all the assurance, which relation and history can give us, that it is so. To persuade a man, that it is his duty to be just, and honest, and sober, and chaste, I am onely to make use of moral arguments. To prove to him, that he has a command over himself, as to his actions, I shew him the absurdities of the doctrine of fatal necessity: and if he should persist and demand further satisfaction, I can do no more, than make an appeal to himself, whether he does not find a power within him of acting or not acting, as he pleaseth: whether he does not deliberate with himself, whether he had best do it or no: and when after some demurs and debates he hath determined his will, of his own accord, which before was indifferent either to this or that, whether he doth not consult about the means to bring about his design: and upon a survey of several, make choice of such, as he judgeth most proper and effectual. In these and the like cases, we can have no Mathematical evidence and demonstration: yet we cannot rationally doubt of the verity of their proofs: tho' the evidence and assurance be onely moral, yet it is such, as will persuade any man, who is free from unjust and irrational prejudice.

Besides,

Besides, upon this kind of assurance (a) depends all the actions of our lives. No man can demonstrate to another, who has not been there, that there are such countries, as India, Persia, and Turkey, or such great cities, as Dehli, Agra, Ispahan, and Constantinople; and yet men send their estates thither, tho' they have only the reports of others for their assurance, and the ability and integrity of the persons, whom they employ and trust in the management of their rich trade. That they are the sons of such and such persons, they are only assured by the testimony of others, and chiefly of their Parents, who have taken care of their education. It would be idle, monstrous, and unnatural to deny to pay them the respect and reverence, due to them, both by the laws of God and nature, upon a pretense, that they have some scruples upon their minds, whether they be their parents or no: and that it cannot be made out demonstratively to them, that they are so. What other assurance have they, that the deeds and conveyances, whereby they hold their estates, derived down to them from their ancestors, at the sealing and delivering of which they were not present, are not counterfeit; and would they be contented to have them called in question upon such a phantastick supposition? No one can demonstrate to himself out of Euclide and Archimedes, that the house, wherein he lyes, will not fall upon his head: and yet for all this bare possibility he sleeps securely and without any disturbance, and will not lye in the open air. Not to heap up more instances in a thing so common, and every where to be met with.

(a) *Estne opus in vita negotiosum aliquod atque actuosum genus, quod non fide præeunte suscipiant, sumant, atque aggrediantur actores?* As Arnobius adv. Gentes lib. 2. pag. 47. Lugd. Bat. 4<sup>to</sup>. 1651. there shews at large with great sharpness of wit and judgment against the Heathen of his time. who objected credulity to the Christians.

All

All satisfaction concerning the certainty of a future state is offered, that can be justly demanded. We have the evidence of reason, and the evidence of religion, which is founded upon the belief of it: the justice of God makes it necessary: and the doctrine of providence and of the government of the world by the alwise and omnipotent Creator suppose it. Things future are not

(b) *Nulla futurorum potest existere comprobatio. Cum ergo hæc sit conditio futurorum, ut teneri & comprehendendi nullius possint anticipationis attactu &c. Arnob. lib. 2. pag. 44.*

triable by (b) sense: they are the objects of our hopes, and of our fears, and of our belief, and of our expectation; and therefore cannot be proved to exist the same way, as things, which every day present themselves to our sight. But how are these men assured, that there is no future state? what demonstration can these great Masters of reason, as they think themselves, whom nothing less will content and satisfy, bring to the contrary? It is but just and reasonable, that they who deny, or so much as call in question, the truth of any opinion, tho' built upon probable arguments, should produce arguments, if not of greater, yet at least of equal probability. To deny a thing boldly at first, without giving any reason for the denial, and then to be very peremptory in the affirmation of a contrary proposition, is against all the laws and rules of wise discoursing and arguing, and is not the effect of judgment, but of meer trifling and foolish conceitedness: much more when they pluck up the very foundations of a science; when they destroy the principles of nature; when they condemn a truth, as is this of a future state, which all mankind in all ages has received and embraced, except an inconsiderable number of wretches like themselves, they should be thoroughly convinced before hand, that their proofs are just and good, and little less than infallible. But all which they alledge in behalf of their infidelity,

delity, is either, that they cannot frame a just and clear idea of such a state : or else they make some little and unphilosophical exceptions and cavils at terms, as *Spirit, incorporeal substance*, and the like : which is the way of Mr. Hobbes; (tho' the notion of an incorporeal substance and of thought is as easie to conceive, and as little liable to just exceptions, as of substance in general, or of substance in extended matter) pleasing themselves onely with the gross images of sensible beings. They cannot pretend to any direct and positive proofs : they neither can nor dare say, that what they imagine is certain and infallible. They only think so, and wish so : and indeed for their wishes they have some reason, tho' none for their opinion. For what malefactor can think of his trial and the consequences of it with any kind of patience, and not wish at the same time, that there were no such things, as a law and a judge to execute that law in their deserved punishment? And besides this, they very foolishly and idly alledge, that they have not spoken with any, who have arisen from the dead to give them an account of it : as if before they would be convinced, whether there be such places, as a heaven or an hell, they would have an exact survey taken of them; and several chorographical schemes and maps made to describe them the better to them. But is not this a most irrational and senseless ground of their infidelity? Have we not in the sacred writings undoubted testimonies of several raised from the dead, beyond all possibility of denial, of which faithful and authentic registers have been made to inform posterity? But may it not also be justly supposed, that these very men, if the most real and certain apparition possible were made to them, after they had recovered themselves from the surprize and affrightment, into which such a gasty sight might cast them, would



would look upon it onely, as a meer phantome? as Cassius, one of the sect of Epicurus, told his friend Brutus, as Plutarch writes in his life, that the evil genius, which appeared to him, was the effect of his melancholy; no other than a dream and the roving of his disturbed imagination, when he was between sleeping and waking: or if a dead person, raised again to life, should appear to them, they would cavil, and say, that he had not been really dead: they would find out some such foolish and idle pretense and excuse; and still hold fast their beloved conclusion. The rich man in the Parable, when he was in hell, was very solicitous for his surviving brethren, that they might not come into that place of torment: and therefore made it his request, that a messenger might be sent thence express to forewarn them; but the proposal was rejected, as unjust and unnecessary. They were sufficiently instructed out of the divine writings, that there was such a place: the Law and the Prophets were continually read, and sounded in their ears, that they could not pretend ignorance. Besides, *if they hear not Moses and the Prophets: neither will they be perswaded, tho' one arose from the dead.*

But let us suppose, in order to the conviction of these men, if any of them should chance to cast their eyes upon these papers, that there were an equal probability on both sides: that as much might be said against the certainty of a future state, as for it: that God had not so clearly and exprelly revealed his will in the holy Scriptures about it: and that the case had not been so fully determined, but yet hung as it were *in equilibrio*: yet because it is of an eternal consequence (c), right rea-

(c) Nonne prior ratio est ex duobus incertis & in ambigua expectatione pendentibus, id potius credere, quod aliquas spes ferat, quam omnino quod nullas? Arnob. p. 44.



son and common prudence should teach a man to make choice of the surer side : nay, if there were less degrees of probability for it, we should make provision however, for fear, that it should prove so. If in matters of ordinary speculation, which signify nothing to our interest and advantage, whether they be true or no, (for what am I the better, whether the Ptolemaic or Copernican hypothesis best solves the various appearances of the heavens) we relinquish the vulgar opinions, which have the prescription of antiquity, and which seem confirmed by sense, as being swayed by more rational proofs and evidences : certainly in a business of such moment, as is the living hereafter for ever in happiness or misery, when there are so many arguments to sway and encline our belief ; when we have all the assurance, which things, that are future, and not yet seen, can possibly have : when the danger is so great, and the loss infinite and irreparable, it is a folly beyond all expression for any person to suffer himself to be cheated, by the corrupt judgment of sense, which in this case cannot pretend to arbitrate, and by the little cavillings and oppositions of a gross phantasie, into the belief of the contrary. If onely the probable hope of gain makes men despise certain danger, and carries them round about the world to the utmost points of East and West : if they undergo, not onely with patience, but with great readiness and cheerfulness, all those uneasinesses and hazards, which such long voyages in tempestuous seas, and through various climates of excessive heat and cold, necessarily subject them to : if they venture their health, and oftentimes their lives : and that too with the good liking and applause of the world, especially if the advantage be any way proportionable to the danger : certainly the interest of our immortal souls should make us adventure

*A Discourse about the certainty*

as much for heaven, a place of infinite blessedness, where we shall live for ever, without feeling the decays of age, and without being weary of those unmixed pleasures, which it affords; and where are heaped up treasures of glory, which no time shall exhaust, if we had not the infallible word of God for it, but onely the dictates of natural religion, and the evidence of right and unprejudiced reason.

Columbus had no demonstration, that there were such vast tracts of land on the other side of the great Atlantic ocean, running out almost from one Pole to the other, which he afterwards discovered: he was onely lead by probable arguments to undertake that voyage: as thinking it very unlikely, that so great a part of the terraqueous globe, over which the Sun passes in his diurnal revolution, should be covered with water. It was lookt upon at first as a project, which had nothing to support it, but the strong phansie of the man, who proposed it: and it was a long time, before he could be furnished with ships, in order to make a discovery. But how were they alarmed at his return with the news, which he brought of another world, which had lay hid for so many ages! how were the opinions of the old Philosophers confuted, that there could be no living between the Tropics, and especially under the Line, by reason of the intolerable heat, which the perpendicular projection of the sun-beams they phansied must necessarily produce: when they were assured from eye-witnesses, that no country in the world could be more populous! Now our B. Saviour, who came down from heaven, has made full and clear discoveries of a glorious kingdom, and has laid down rules and directions for our journeying thither: rules and directions so plain,

plain, that we cannot fail of arriving at that blessed place, if we observe and follow them. What can any one alledge to justify or excuse his folly? how can he answer it to God, or to himself, at the last great day, if after all this he should doubt, whether there be such a place, as heaven or no, and so doubt, as wretchedly to neglect the happy opportunities of getting thither at the end of his life?

If, as Socrates argued a little before his death, nothing remains to a man after he is dead, then he would be the less troubled at what he was then about to suffer: for then he should cease to be mistaken, if he were mistaken. But if there be another state in the next life, as there is the highest reason to believe, and no reason to believe the contrary, what a foolish bargain will it appear, the Epicure has made in buying the vain and perishing pleasures of the world at the price of his soul! It will then be an infallible demonstration, that he has acted against the common rules of prudence, in preferring a trifle, a shadow, a humour, before the favour of God; before the fulness of joy, which is to be had in his presence; before immortal blessedness, with which he shall see the righteous crowned; which will heighten his anguish, and make it intolerable: and the thought of this will as much torment him, as the very flames, that he might have been happy as they, but for his own wretched carelessness and obstinate infidelity.

To conclude this short discourse, which I most heartily and passionately recommend to the serious and impartial consideration of all such, as vouchsafe to read it.

Seeing that there will be and must be a day of judgment, in which we shall give a strict account of our lives: that there is a future state, whose duration shall be beyond the limits

*A Discourse about the certainty, &c.*

limits of time; that, when we depart out of this life, we launch forth into an ocean, which knows neither bounds nor shore: that there are eternal rewards and punishments in the other world: and that according to the tenor and habit of our lives, and the condition we are found in at our death, we shall receive our everlasting doom: how much does it concern every one of us so to live here in this world, that is, in the fear of God and in a conscientious discharge and practise of all Christian and moral virtues, as to live for ever happy in the next!

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FINIS.

